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Avalanche Notes

U.S. Forest Service
Westwide Avalanche Network

JANUARY 1991

As January ended, it brought to an end the first half of the winter of 90-91, and it's been a thoroughly forgettable half-winter over a good portion of the West. No area has been harder hit with a dose of the dries than the Sierra of California, which is in its fifth year of drought. January snows were again dismal, as the area endured its third month of chronic high pressure: Alpine Meadows recorded but 12% of normal, and in the process suffered through its driest January since records began in 1968. Mammoth Mountain reported no snow at all.

Portions of the Rockies are also limping through a minimal winter. Perhaps hardest hit is Sun Valley, ID. Only 7" fell there in January for 16% of normal, this on the heels of a very dry December.

January snows were stingy almost everywhere else, too. Here's a rundown around the West:

Alyeska, AK recorded 59" of snow on the 16th-20th, and predictably the south-central area of Alaska witnessed an avalanche cycle on the 17th-20th. Doug Fesler reports that an old 2-story mine building near Hatcher Pass was hit by an avalanche, tumbled end-over-end, and wound up in the runout still intact! Alyeska ended the month with 96% of normal snows, while Eaglecrest in southeast Alaska had very little snow all month, but ended with 17" on the 30th-31st.

In the Cascades of Washington and Oregon, sustained snow and rain fell from the 7th-16th. During this time, Mt. Rainier-Paradise recorded 88" of snow and about 15" of water, while Stevens Pass got nearly 20" of water. A cycle of avalanches rippled through the Cascades on the 7th-12th. This storm was not enough, though, to get the area to normal snowfalls: Mt. Rainier and Stevens Pass recorded 64%, Mt. Hood Meadows, 31%, and Crystal Mt., only 25%.

In the Intermountain region, Big Mountain, MT received 18" on the 1st and then got steady snows on the 7th-19th and wound up with 124% of normal. Bridger Bowl, MT was 100% of normal, but all other sites came up short. Big Sky, MT got 61%, while Jackson Hole and Teton Pass, WY, even with daily snows on the 8th-19th, got but 68%. A big storm hit the Wasatch of Utah mid-month, when Solitude got 25" on the 15th and Snowbird recorded 42" on the 14th-16th. Snowbird ended the month with 90% of normal.

In Colorado only Beaver Creek (120%) and Vail (103%) had above-par snows. It was a thoroughly unremarkable month. The northern third of the mountains received 56-90% of normal snow; the central third, 58-85%; and the southern third, 73-85%, although Wolf Creek managed only 49%, even with the benefit of 24" on the 4th-5th. Taos, NM recorded only 43% of normal -- its first dry month of the season.

Three serious avalanche incidents occurred in January. On the 20th on Teton Pass, WY, a father and son, age 13, were pausing in their ski run down a slope on Mount Glory when the snow fractured above them. Both were carried 1,200 feet vertical and were shallowly buried. Both managed to punch an airway to the surface. A second son and another skier descended the avalanche path and dug out the victims, neither of whom were injured.

The second incident occurred on the 21st at Berthoud Pass, CO. A snowboarder crossed a rope into a closed area, triggered an avalanche, and was swept about 300 feet down slope. Though only partly buried, he suffered a broken femur.

The third incident occurred on the 31st in the Hyalite area south of Bozeman, MT. Two snowmobilers were digging out their stuck machines on a steep slope and in the process triggered an avalanche. Both men and their machines were swept downslope and buried. Both men managed to get fingertips to the surface, which allowed a quick rescue by other snowmobilers who had witnessed the slide.

In January, a total of 18 incidents were reported, resulting in 20 people caught, 4 partly buried, 4 buried, 1 injured; in addition, 1 vehicle was caught and 1 building damaged. Seasonal totals are 51 incidents, 56 people caught, 11 partly buried, 10 buried, 4 injured, and 3 killed; 4 vehicles have been caught and 2 buildings damaged.

U.S. FOREST SERVICE
ALPINE SNOW AND AVALANCHE RESEARCH PROJECT
STATION FORT COLLINS, COLO.

JANUARY 1991

SUMMARY OF WEATHER AND SNOW CONDITIONS

AREA	SNOWFALL			WATER EQUIVALENT			SNOW DEPTH			TEMPERATURE			WIND SPEED AND DIRECTION		
	TOTAL SNOWFALL IN.	AVG. IN.	MAX IN.	TOTAL WATER IN.	MAX IN.	NO. OF DAYS	MAX IN.	MIN IN.	AVG IN.	MEAN	MIN	AVG	AVG FOR 6 PERIODS	HOUR PERIODS	FASTEST HOUR
CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN ROCKY MOUNTAINS	8.0	0.3	5.0	1.1	0.3	1	1.1	0.0	0.3	1.1	0.0	0.3	3.0	15	40
ARAPAHOE BASIN, COLO	3.0	0.1	1.0	0.4	0.1	1	0.4	0.0	0.1	0.4	0.0	0.1	1.0	15	20
ASPEN HIGHLANDS, COLO	2.0	0.1	1.0	0.3	0.1	1	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.1	1.0	15	20
BEAR LAKE, RMNP, COLO	2.0	0.1	1.0	0.3	0.1	1	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.1	1.0	15	20
BEAVER CREEK, COLO	2.0	0.1	1.0	0.3	0.1	1	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.1	1.0	15	20
BERTHOUD PASS, COLO	2.0	0.1	1.0	0.3	0.1	1	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.1	1.0	15	20
BRECKENRIDGE, COLO	2.0	0.1	1.0	0.3	0.1	1	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.1	1.0	15	20
CHRYSLER MOUNTAIN, COLO	2.0	0.1	1.0	0.3	0.1	1	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.1	1.0	15	20
CREATED BUTTE, COLO	2.0	0.1	1.0	0.3	0.1	1	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.1	1.0	15	20
FOOTHILL, COLO	2.0	0.1	1.0	0.3	0.1	1	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.1	1.0	15	20
KAYSTONE, COLO	2.0	0.1	1.0	0.3	0.1	1	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.1	1.0	15	20
MONARCH, COLO	2.0	0.1	1.0	0.3	0.1	1	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.1	1.0	15	20
PURGATORY, COLO	2.0	0.1	1.0	0.3	0.1	1	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.1	1.0	15	20
RED MOUNTAIN, COLO	2.0	0.1	1.0	0.3	0.1	1	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.1	1.0	15	20
SUNLIGHT, COLO	2.0	0.1	1.0	0.3	0.1	1	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.1	1.0	15	20
TAOS, NEW MEXICO	2.0	0.1	1.0	0.3	0.1	1	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.1	1.0	15	20
TELLURIDE, COLO	2.0	0.1	1.0	0.3	0.1	1	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.1	1.0	15	20
WALL, COLO	2.0	0.1	1.0	0.3	0.1	1	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.1	1.0	15	20
WINTER PARK, COLO	2.0	0.1	1.0	0.3	0.1	1	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.1	1.0	15	20
WOLF CREEK, COLO	2.0	0.1	1.0	0.3	0.1	1	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.1	1.0	15	20
INTERMOUNTAIN	8.0	0.3	5.0	1.1	0.3	1	1.1	0.0	0.3	1.1	0.0	0.3	3.0	15	40
BIG MOUNTAIN, MONT	5.0	0.6	1.0	1.9	0.6	1	1.9	0.0	0.6	1.9	0.0	0.6	1.0	15	20
BIG SKY, MONT	5.0	0.6	1.0	1.9	0.6	1	1.9	0.0	0.6	1.9	0.0	0.6	1.0	15	20
JACKSON HOLE, MONT	5.0	0.6	1.0	1.9	0.6	1	1.9	0.0	0.6	1.9	0.0	0.6	1.0	15	20
PARK WEST, MONT	5.0	0.6	1.0	1.9	0.6	1	1.9	0.0	0.6	1.9	0.0	0.6	1.0	15	20
SCHWEITZER, MONT	5.0	0.6	1.0	1.9	0.6	1	1.9	0.0	0.6	1.9	0.0	0.6	1.0	15	20
SOLITUDE, MONT	5.0	0.6	1.0	1.9	0.6	1	1.9	0.0	0.6	1.9	0.0	0.6	1.0	15	20
SUN VALLEY, IDAHO	5.0	0.6	1.0	1.9	0.6	1	1.9	0.0	0.6	1.9	0.0	0.6	1.0	15	20
TETON PASS, IDAHO	5.0	0.6	1.0	1.9	0.6	1	1.9	0.0	0.6	1.9	0.0	0.6	1.0	15	20
WEST COAST	5.0	0.6	1.0	1.9	0.6	1	1.9	0.0	0.6	1.9	0.0	0.6	1.0	15	20
ALPINE MEADOWS, CAL	2.0	0.1	1.0	0.3	0.1	1	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.1	1.0	15	20
ALYESKA, ALASKA	2.0	0.1	1.0	0.3	0.1	1	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.1	1.0	15	20
CRYSTAL MOUNTAIN, WASH	2.0	0.1	1.0	0.3	0.1	1	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.1	1.0	15	20
GALE CREST, ALASKA	2.0	0.1	1.0	0.3	0.1	1	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.1	1.0	15	20
HEAVENLY VALLEY, CALIF	2.0	0.1	1.0	0.3	0.1	1	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.1	1.0	15	20
JUNE MOUNTAIN, CALIF	2.0	0.1	1.0	0.3	0.1	1	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.1	1.0	15	20
MAMMOTH MOUNTAIN, CALIF	2.0	0.1	1.0	0.3	0.1	1	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.1	1.0	15	20
MT. HOOD MOUNTAIN, CALIF	2.0	0.1	1.0	0.3	0.1	1	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.1	1.0	15	20
MT. RAINIER, WASH	2.0	0.1	1.0	0.3	0.1	1	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.1	1.0	15	20
SNOW ALPINE, CALIF	2.0	0.1	1.0	0.3	0.1	1	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.1	1.0	15	20
STEVENSON PASS, WASH	2.0	0.1	1.0	0.3	0.1	1	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.1	1.0	15	20
SUGAR BOWL, CALIF	2.0	0.1	1.0	0.3	0.1	1	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.1	1.0	15	20

DATA INCOMPLETE OR MISSING
ONE OR MORE DAYS OF RECORD
IF AVERAGE VALUE IS ENTERED, LESS THAN 10 DAYS RECORD IS MISSING
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U.S. FOREST SERVICE

JANUARY 1991
AVALANCHE SUMMARYWEST COAST

--=DATA INCOMPLETE OR MISSING
>=GREATER THAN OR EQUAL TO
+=ALSO OCCURRED ON OTHER DATES